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ABSTRACT

Authorized by the National Literacy Act of 1991, state literacy resource centers (SLRCs) are charged with assisting local public and private nonprofit efforts to enhance literacy. SLRCs have developed innovative approaches to their mandate to stimulate the coordination of literacy services. They have encouraged government and industry partnerships, including partnerships with small businesses, private nonprofit organizations, and community-based organizations. They have also made innovative connections within and among states and with the federal government. For most SLRCs, the mandate to increase local capacity to delivery literacy services is a central focus. They encourage innovation and experimentation in literacy activities through extensive staff development efforts, technical assistance operations, and innovative activities. SLRCs promote the diffusion and adoption of state-of-the-art teaching methods, technologies, and program evaluations. Reciprocal efforts between the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) and SLRCs advance customary resource center responsibilities to the level of cutting edge innovation. For SLRCs, the role of collecting and disseminating resources is central, and most maintain collections of instructional materials and teacher resource materials. The SLRC role in providing reciprocal linkage between the NIFL and literacy practitioners is most evident in the Literacy and Information aNd Communications System (LINCS). (YLB)

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Adventures in Collaboration: State Literacy Resource Centers

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This document was prepared to accompany a session by the same title at which SLRC directors reported on accomplishments of their agencies at the AAACE Conference in Charlotte, NC, October 31, 1996. The document provides an eclectic but by no means comprehensive overview of some of the accomplishments of the short history of SLRCs.

Beginnings

State literacy resource centers were authorized by the National Literacy Act of 1991 and charged with assisting local public and private nonprofit efforts to advance literacy. The legislation mandates SLRCs to engage in activities designed to:

- stimulate the coordination of literacy services
- enhance the capacity of state and local organizations to provide literacy services
- serve as a reciprocal link between the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) and service providers for the purpose of sharing information, data, research expertise and literacy resources.

The legislation further outlined several areas of activity for SLRCs including staff development, technical assistance, resource development, information collection and dissemination, interagency consensus building, and policy development.

Across the country, SLRCs conduct programs of staff development and technical assistance; they also collect and disseminate teacher resources and instructional materials. Beyond this, individual SLRCs have responded differently to the mandates, keying their varied activities to the particular needs of individual states, and often to their institutional linkages. Some examples of SLRC activities in each of the three broad areas of effort are described below.

Stimulating Coordination of Literacy Services

In many states, SLRCs are fulfilling a great need by encouraging collaborative efforts among literacy agencies, thus assisting public and private agencies in coordinating the delivery of literacy services.

> California's SLRC is a cooperative venture of six state agencies through a State Collaborative Literacy Council. From its location in the state library, the SLRC of California coordinates services and disseminates information state-wide through a system of seven Regional Resource Centers. Located strategically throughout the state at adult education sites, the Regional Resource Centers house resource collections and offer staff development.
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> From its location in the Martin Luther King Branch of the District of Columbia Public Library, the DCLRC offers services to publicly funded and community based literacy groups throughout the district. It coordinates communications and staff development, maintains a collection of adult education resources, and provides a helpline for clients and providers.

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The Arizona Adult Literacy and Technology Resource Center was established as a not-for-profit agency with excellent connections to the state education agency. It is responsible for much of the state's staff development, augmented by eight regional staff development associates. Also a not-for-profit agency, Literacy Investment for Tomorrow (LIFT) was initiated in 1988 following an in-depth review of Missouri's literacy needs and has served as Missouri's SLRC since 1992.

Two regional resource centers -- the Northwest Regional Literacy Resource Center (Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington) and the New England Literacy Resource Center (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont) bring together combined state resources to enlarge services and make them available across regions.

SLRCs have developed innovative approaches to the coordination of literacy services by assisting public and private agencies in coordinating the delivery of literacy services. They have encouraged government and industry partnerships, including partnerships with small businesses, private nonprofit organizations, and community-based organizations. They have also made innovative connections within and among states and with the federal government.

The Tennessee Literacy Resource Center at the Center for Literacy Studies developed a system for measuring and reporting performance through a grant from the NIFL. They involved a number of state agencies in the process of developing the *Tennessee Reporting and Improvement Management System* which the state is now adopting for human service agencies. Although the Resource Center is now closed, the Center for Literacy Studies continues capacity building and collaboration efforts.

In Texas, the Texas Literacy Resource Center worked with business, industry, labor, education, and government agencies to hold a conference on collaborating for a skilled workforce. In partnership with Illinois businesses, the Illinois Resource Center developed a Workplace Education Training Institute to improve the delivery of basic skills on the job site. Participants who complete the five days of training and successfully complete an internship with a business are certified as Workplace Education Specialists.

North Carolina Literacy Resource Center was established within the Governor's Commission on Workforce Preparedness. Staff members have served on task forces and committees to develop policy in the state, ensuring that literacy issues are included in workforce development, performance management, and welfare reform initiatives in North Carolina.

In Kentucky, SLRC responsibilities fall to the Center for Adult Education and Literacy, which is part of the Cabinet for Workforce Development. System development issues, including performance measurement, program effectiveness, and professional development are all part of this coordinated approach to adult education and workforce development.

The New Jersey State Literacy Resource Center, a cooperative venture between the Department of Education and the Employment and Training Commission, provides library and resource services at three regional sites, coordinates all adult education staff development and training statewide, and facilitates interagency dialogue at state and local levels.

In Nebraska, the State Literacy Resource Center planned and coordinated the state's first Governor's Summit on Literacy Education, bringing representatives from these diverse groups -- as well as state policy makers -- together, face-to-face for the first time, to confront literacy issues in Nebraska and begin, through focus group work, to create collaborative solutions.

Enhancing the Capacity of State and Local Organizations

For most SLRCs, this mandate to increase local capacity to deliver literacy services is a central focus. SLRCs encourage innovation and experimentation in literacy activities that enhance the delivery of literacy services and address emerging problems. They do this through extensive staff development efforts, by maintaining technical assistance operations, and through innovative activities. SLRCs promote the diffusion and adoption of state-of-the-art teaching methods, technologies and program evaluations. They are at the forefront of encouraging full time professional adult educators.

In New England, a regional resource center fosters interstate collaboration. Practitioners from several states conducted a staff development needs assessment from which learning disabilities emerged as the number one area of concern. The New England Literacy Resource Center director headed a work group that developed a resource kit of materials on learning disabilities. Each state in the region conducts introductory workshops on learning disabilities and lends the kit to local practitioners.

California's State Literacy Resource Center supports a program of mini-grants and in 1995-96, gave over $140,000 in literacy mini-grants to ten local programs. Areas of emphasis were family literacy, workplace literacy, electronic connectivity for local programs, innovative uses of technology in the classroom, marketing services to students, and special services and support to New Readers.

Most SLRCs conduct staff development projects and New Reader involvement initiatives.

In Ohio, the Ohio Literacy Resource Center holds annual "academies" for practitioners and administrators to explore ideas, learn new methodologies, etc. The Illinois Literacy Resource Center conducts workplace education and family literacy seminars annually. Michigan's State Literacy Resource Center conducts summer academies, as well as citizenship and family literacy training. Arkansas' LRC coordinates staff development for school based and volunteer programs throughout the state.

The Northwest Regional Literacy Resource Center guides and supports the creation and revision of state of the art teacher training modules for use in all four member states. Nebraska's Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy at the University of Nebraska has taken over the Literacy Resource Center's work. NISAL designs and conducts for-credit and not-for-credit staff development using an interactive, distance learning format to reduce costs and make the training more accessible to the state's rural areas.

SLRCs have sponsored adult learner conferences in several states. NC Literacy Resource Center and NC Literacy Association co-sponsored the "first ever" NC New Readers' Conference in May, 1995. Co-chaired by a New Reader and NC LRC's director, the conference was planned by adult learners and attended by over 125 people. The State Literacy

Resource Center and State Collaborative Literacy Council of California brought over 100 adult learners together from across the state in March, 1996. To honor the adult learners who planned and attended the Conference, Governor Pete Wilson declared March 9, 1996, as Adult Learner Day in California. Read more about the California conference on the SLRC's WWW site at: **http://www.otan.dni.us/slrc/alconference.html**

Several SLRCs have published results of their staff development or other endeavors.

In Tennessee, a team of practitioners participated with TLRC staff in an inquiry based staff development project on learning disabilities. They expanded their instructional repertoires and developed a publication on learning disabilities among adults. Nebraska's NISAL published *Planning and Implementing Integrated Theme-Based Instruction*, a curriculum guide and resource book that uses an integrated approach to adult literacy education. The Michigan SLRC publication, *Literacy Networks*, includes articles describing collaboration and innovative practices. The Ohio, Oklahoma and North Carolina LRCs publish occasional papers on research, teaching, and policy issues. The *Internet Directory to Adult Literacy and Education Resources*, edited at the Minnesota Literacy Resource Center, contains a wealth of information of interest to the field of adult literacy. Now in its second edition, the Directory is sold world-wide.

Use of technology in adult literacy is an area of great interest among SLRCs.

The Arizona Adult Literacy and Technology Resource Center teaches practitioners to use technology and invites practitioners to review and examine computer based instructional software with the assistance of trained staff. Northwest Regional Literacy Resource Center supplies teachers with software in return for a written evaluation. NRLRC publishes the results in an annual *Software Buyer's Guide*.

In North Carolina, literacy practitioners became technology mentors through an advanced Internet training co-sponsored by NC LRC and the National Center on Adult Literacy. NC LRC provides room on its WWW site for local program home pages. The Oklahoma LRC established an electronic bulletin board for literacy and adult education, accessible statewide via a toll-free telephone number. It lists grant opportunities, calendars of literacy events and trainings.

Illinois' SLRC is located in the Secretary of State's Literacy Office, and provides leadership in technology and other literacy issues. On August 1- 4, 1996, the ILRC and other Illinois literacy initiatives co-sponsored the ninth annual Adult Literacy and Technology Conference in Chicago.

Serving as a Reciprocal Link between the National Institute for Literacy and Service Providers

Reciprocal efforts between NIFL and SLRCs advance customary resource center responsibilities to the level of cutting edge innovation. SLRCs have been recipients of NIFL grants to develop performance

management reporting and tracking systems, to explore inter-agency staff development, to establish technology hubs, and to establish content standards for adult literacy.

For SLRCs, the role of collecting and disseminating resources is central, and most SLRCs maintain collections of instructional materials and teacher resource materials. Through these collections, adult literacy practitioners have access to state of the art methodologies, instructional materials, and innovative new technologies.

> Catalogs of SLRC collections (e.g. Virginia, California, Minnesota, Northwest Regional) are widely available and lending practices are generous. In some cases catalogs are or will be available on-line (California, Minnesota, North Carolina).

Nowhere is the SLRC role in providing reciprocal linkage between the National Institute for Literacy and literacy practitioners clearer than in **Literacy Information aNd Communication System (LINCS), designed by a work group of NIFL and SLRC staffs. One purpose of LINCS is to guide library collection development and resource dissemination using common cataloging forms. Through LINCS, adult literacy practitioners will be able to search any SLRC collection.

Another highly visible way in which LINCS connections are realized is through the **Regional Technology Hub Project**. The four hubs maintain WWW servers and house WWW sites for the SLRCs in their regions. Through the hubs, users can easily locate individual resource center sites as well as national literacy sites.

Southern Region: **http://www.ehrd.tamu.edu/slcc/**

> The Southern Literacy Communications Consortium is a joint project of the Tennessee and Texas SLRCs, with the server located at Texas A and M University. The fourteen states that can be accessed through this hub are: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Midwest Region: **http://archon.educ.kent.edu/Midwest/index.html**

> The Midwest Adult Literacy Network is headquartered at Kent State University, home of the Ohio Literacy Resource Center. The twelve states whose WWW sites can be accessed from the Ohio WWW site are: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

West Region: **http://www.otan.dni.us/HUBIV/home.html**

> Located at the California Literacy Resource Center, this hub is home to western SLRCs, the Northwest Regional LRC, and the Pacific Islands. Imagine the impact of being able to communicate across nine time zones. The 18 states included are: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. The Pacific Islands include the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Midway Island, Northern Mariana Islands, and Palau.

Northeast Region:

> Soon to be located at the New England Literacy Resource Center at World Education in Boston, MA, the Northeast Regional Hub is a newly forged collaboration between NELRC

and the National Center on Adult Literacy in Philadelphia. It will serve eleven states: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, and Vermont plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

When NIFL and the SLRCs were authorized by the National Literacy Act in 1991, the adult literacy field hailed it as an important step in building an infrastructure for research and information dissemination long seen as vital to the field of adult literacy. Through this infrastructure, efforts to engage in critical research, to advance the level of professional development, and to foster communication among practitioners and agencies would at last be possible.

The importance of SLRCs in research is evident through individual state projects and in joint efforts between SLRCs and NIFL.

Four SLRCs are involved in *Equipped For the Future*, NIFL's **System Reform Initiative**. In 1995-96, the New England Resource Center and Tennessee's Center for Literacy Studies sought information on adults' uses of literacy in their roles as citizens. North Carolina LRC built consensus within the state on literacy needs for the role of worker. Maine SLRC, Center for Adult Learning and Literacy convened literacy stake holders (learners, teachers, administrators, government agencies) to develop content standards that build on newly approved Quality Indicators. In 1996-96, NELRC and the CLS are continuing their work on citizenship while CALL and NC LRC are working together on the role of worker.

Looking Ahead

Using a grant from the National Institute for Literacy, a work group of SLRC directors (AZ, CA, MI, OH, NC, TN), state directors, and representatives of government and education agencies explored possibilities of sharing information, projects, etc., through a Regional Resource Initiative. The report of this work makes a number of recommendations for interstate resource sharing and is available from NIFL.

Originally seen as an exciting and innovative opportunity for creating linkages within the adult literacy community, SLRCs have been threatened by budget cuts in recent years. FY 1995 funding was rescinded and no FY 1996 funds were appropriated for SLRCs. Both House and Senate versions of block grant legislation included SLRCs. In the uncertain political climate SLRCs have become quite entrepreneurial. A number of SLRCs have worked with state education agencies to develop cooperative efforts involving use of other adult education funding for SLRCs. Some SLRCs have either closed or turned their operations over to other agencies.

The $95 million increase in adult education funding for FY 1997 is seen as opening up new opportunities for SLRCs. It seems likely that SLRCs will benefit along with the entire adult literacy community from this nearly 40% increase in federal funds.